

MG Y-type

Part Two



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Y tourers are comparatively rare in Britain and attract attention when they appear at meetings. For the person needing an MG with four seats they make an interesting alternative to the saloon cars more usually chosen.



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The dashboard layout is similar to the TC and quite unlike the saloons. The front bucket seats tip up to allow easy access to the rear seats.

In last month's magazine I told the story of the development of the 1 1/4 litre Y-type saloon and I said in that article how well the new car was received by both the motoring press and MG enthusiasts alike. The late 1940s and early 1950s were, in some ways, a difficult time for people in Britain as the economic circumstances brought on by the aftermath of a long and costly war led to an extension of rationing and a shortage of materials. New cars were difficult to find and even the most well-worn of prewar cars would sell for prices well above their real worth. However, those able to obtain cars, and the petrol to run them, could enjoy travelling on roads far emptier of traffic than can possibly be imagined by today's M25 commuter. In that pre-motorway age journeys were always made through pretty villages and towns, rather than round them, and no one had thought of 'traffic calming' speed bumps and chicanes - the only examples of those to be found were on the airport-perimeter race tracks being opened up

around the country!

Writing in 'The Autocar' in 1947, John Dugdale painted an attractive picture of the joys of continental travel in the Y-type he took to France and Italy. In spite of the length of this trip, the only problem he had with the car was a short in the starter motor switch, and he was full of praise for the car's performance. It is interesting that the spares he packed were confined to a roll of insulating tape and some copper wire, plus a couple of jerrycans full of petrol in case they couldn't find any in Italy where there was a strike by petrol distributors at the time! He tried the car out on part of the route of the Mille Miglia and averaged 54 mph on the journey from Brescia to Milan. The overall petrol consumption for the whole trip was 30 mpg. He found that although the

car wasn't all that fast, and he only managed to reach a maximum speed of 75 mph on the speedometer, he could easily cruise all day at 55-65 mph.

Although the Y-type was popular in many markets as a saloon car, the factory felt there was a demand for an open version which would give buyers rather more passenger room than was available in the strictly two-seater TC. Prewar the company always offered four-seater open tourers, often as alternative bodywork on the same chassis used by the two-seater cars. Just prior to the outbreak of war there were open tourer versions of the SVW range of cars in both two-door 'Tickford' form and, with the 2-litre SA and 2.6-litre WA, as four-door Charlesworth tourers. In order to satisfy some of the demand for a car in this market sector an open version of the Y-type was designed.

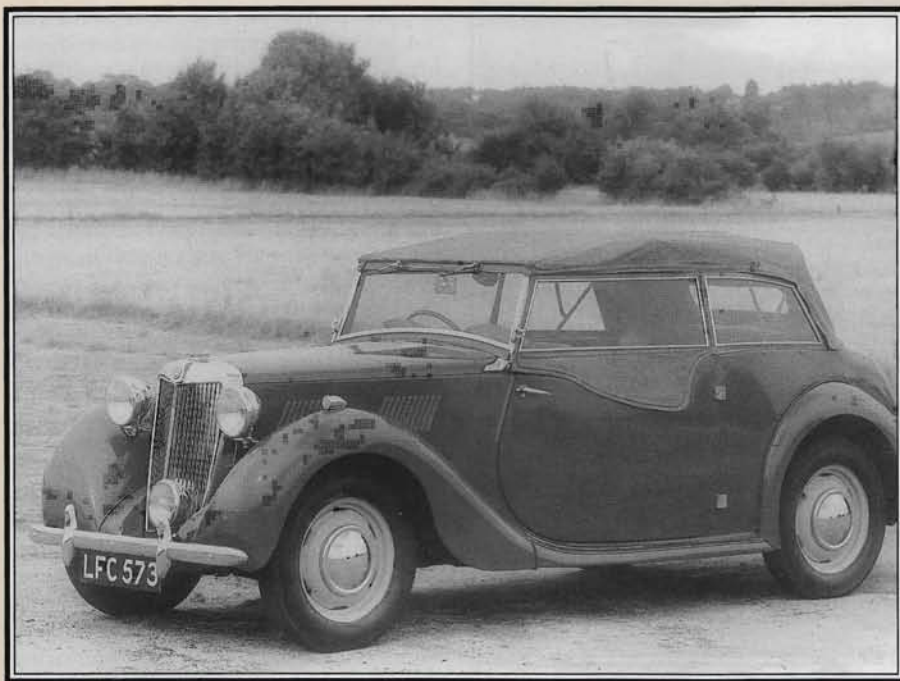
Handsome styling had been a hallmark of the prewar MG tourers and, in particular, the 'Tickford' drophead coupe was an imposing car. In contrast,

the Y-tourer, known by the factory as the YT, was rather more workmanlike than handsome. One well known motoring writer described it as 'a bathtub on wheels' - which is, perhaps, a little unfair! Actually the styling grows on you and it is certainly a useful machine for the club member with a need for a roomy four-seater open car. The lines are similar to other open cars of the era, the Singer for example, and when fully open, rides and feels, for the occupants of the front seats, very much like a TD without quite as much performance or quite such good roadholding.

The standard saloon has to make do with a single carburettor version of the XPAG engine but the open tourer was felt to need something a bit more sporting so it was fitted with the same engine, but in its TC specification complete with twin carburettors and modified camshaft. Another feature transferred from the sports car was the dashboard. Although not identical to the one used on the TC, essentially it looked the same, using a similar fabric covered board with a large tachometer in front of the driver and matching speedometer placed in front of the passenger. The minor dials and the switches were all contained in a TC-style central panel. This dashboard made more sense for an open car with sporting pretensions than the polished, walnut veneered wooden one used in the saloons.

As the export market was to be the prime target, the car was designed to be easily built in lefthand drive form. About this time all Y-types were modified under the bonnet to make fitting lefthand drive steering easier. The battery box was moved and the oil pump modified to accommodate the steering column. In the same way that special US versions of the TC were modified for that market, the YT was fitted with flashing direction indicators for sale in some parts of North America. These were incorporated within the front sidelights by fitting double filament bulbs and at the rear by interrupting the brake light circuit by means of relays when the indicators were operated. However, the other major export market was Australia, where right hand drive models would be needed, and here the flashing direction indicators were not fitted.

The coachwork design was based on that of the saloon but with just two rear hinged doors which were constructed rather differently than those used on the saloon. At the back, the boot was virtually unchanged giving adequate luggage capacity and retaining the ability to carry additional suitcases on the lowered boot lid. The doors were cut away at the top, in the then current 'sporting' fashion, and the windscreen could be lowered if required. The interior trim was similar to the saloon, as was the interior space, although rear seat passengers had their elbow room slightly



The YT hood gives good weather protection and is concealed behind the rear seat when it is stowed. Replacement hoods, sidescreen frames and covers are available.

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A YB saloon that looks particularly smart painted this colour. Single colours suit the car well and quite a high proportion of production didn't have two-tone paintwork.

reduced by the pockets to store the hood irons. The front seats could be tipped up to ease access to the rear seats.

The hood stowage was particularly neat. When lowered, the hood and frame were kept in a compartment which extended behind and round each side of the rear seat and could be concealed by zip-fastened flaps. The rear window in the hood could be lowered to provide additional ventilation when erect. Apart from the more powerful engine, the mechanical specification remained unchanged but the bodywork modifications reduced the overall weight by nearly 90 lbs., which must have helped to improve the performance of the car. Like the saloon, the tourer had the very useful 'Jackall' jacking system which had to be used with some care on soft surfaces. One owner of my acquaintance was dismayed to find the jacks slowly sinking into his smart, newly tarred drive after he had raised the car and removed one of the wheels to

grease the suspension!

The tourers were nearly all exported so, although almost eight hundred were built in total, very few exist in Britain today. Some cars have been returned from export markets but there are still far fewer around than of almost any other postwar MG. From the sales point of view the YT could hardly be called a huge success but it isn't clear whether this was due to there not being the same demand for open tourers as existed prewar, or just to a shortage of cars available for

sale. For most of its life home sales were still restricted, with most of the production going overseas, and perhaps more examples would have sold had they been available in greater numbers on the home market. For all its quirky looks, the Y-tourer is a solid and practical car for family use. For a few years one keen club member has even used his YT to tow a caravan on continental holidays.

The difficulty would be finding one to buy as so few are ever on the market at any one time. Perhaps the best place to look would be in one of those overseas markets where there were a few more sold. Only cars with sound bodywork could be considered as wise purchases as few replacement parts for the body are available, but restoration should prove easier than the equivalent saloon as there is rather less of it – only two doors and no solid roof, winding windows or sunroof to worry about! Someone looking for a car that will stand out in a crowd could do worse than con-

sider a YT.

By the end of 1951 the Y-type had been in production for over four years and the mechanical specification was inferior to that of the TD produced alongside it at Abingdon. In an attempt to remedy this a number of changes were introduced for the 1952 model year that improved the car and made the replacement model, now called the YB, probably the one I would look for if I were in the market for a Y-type.

Changes made to the car when the YB was introduced were extensive but not very apparent to the casual observer. The most important modifications were to the braking system and running gear, which brought the car up to date and rationalised it with the TD. The Lockheed braking system fitted to the YA was little changed from the first hydraulic system introduced to MG sports cars when the TA was announced in 1936. Basically the same design was used for the postwar TC and when the YA was introduced a similar, but not interchangeable, system using just one hydraulic cylinder for each front brake drum was fitted. The YB, however had a twin leading shoe system – that is two cylinders for each front brake drum – which was markedly more efficient. In common with the TD, the front brake drums were now integral with the hubs rather than separate as on the YA. Earlier TDs had also used separate brake drums but had always been fitted with the twin leading shoe brakes.

The front brake drum and hub change was matched by a change to the rear axle as well. In common with most other cars



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These pictures clearly illustrate the difference between the YA, which has 16 in. wheels, and the YB with its smaller 15 in. wheels and deeper section rear wings.

of the period in the Nuffield Group, the YB benefited by being fitted with a the more modern hypoid back axle which was potentially much quieter in use. The wheels were at the same time



Betty Haig and Barbara Marshall with their Y-type before the 1950 Monte Carlo Rally. Note the 'clearview' panel in front of the driver and the electric defroster in front of the passenger. Saloon cars of the period had poor heating and demisting systems and Winter travel meant frozen windscreens and poor visibility.



The last YB chassis from the factory was used by Dick Jacobs for this special seen here racing at Silverstone in the 6 hr. relay race in 1954. The engine was tuned to TD MkII specification and the body was constructed of fibreglass over a steel tube framework.

changed from 16 in. to 15 in. diameter and the tyres increased in width from 5.00/5.25 to 5.50 section to improve the roadholding. A further improvement which helped in that direction was the introduction of a front anti roll bar and heavier duty rear shock absorbers.

These mechanical changes forced a couple of body modifications. The smaller sized wheels took up rather less of the space under the rear wings so to improve the appearance of the car these were made slightly deeper, something which is quite apparent when viewed from the side of the car. The smaller wheels and wider tyres would not fit in

the YA spare wheel stowage compartment so on the YB this was made an inch taller. This point can occasionally cause difficulties for restorers repairing a YB body using some panels from a YA – the spare wheel may not fit!

Much improved as the YB was, it still could not be seen as a truly modern car. Even press reports at the time spoke of it as being 'traditional', which was another way of saying it was outdated, and the sales figures for the revised car bear this out with only 1,301 being built before production ended towards the end of 1953. In due course it was to be replaced by the superb ZA Magnette, which was

in all departments a more modern car, but in the meanwhile the owners of the few YBs built could enjoy the benefits of driving an attractive and much improved car still boasting the prewar style luxuries of an opening windscreen, a sunroof (becoming something of a rarity on 1950s cars) and a rear window blind. 'The Autocar' report summed up the charm of the YB in its report in April, 1952 by saying 'Considered as a whole, the MG saloon is a very desirable car. It is light, lively, economical, handles well, has a good turn of speed and is handy in traffic and on narrow roads. It has a quality feel possessed by few small cars, and many desirable features found only on larger or more expensive products.....It also has that air of a thoroughbred, brought about no doubt by its sporting ancestors that created the slogan "Safety Fast!"'

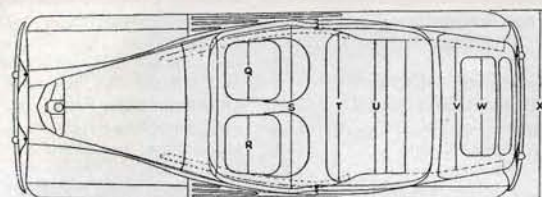
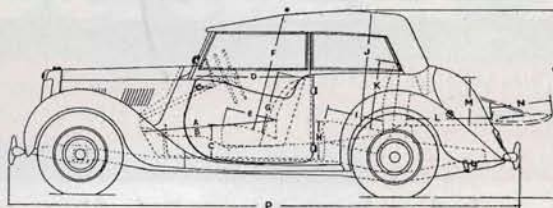
In addition to the major changes when the YB was announced, there were many minor alterations in specification during the whole production run of the Y-type, mainly due to changes in components – especially electrical components – as the British car industry modernised after the war. For example the earliest cars were fitted with 8 in. headlamps but these were replaced with the 7 in. units from chassis number Y4760. These later lamps accepted the standard sealed beam units mandatory in some markets. As with the TC, the earlier cars had their engines painted dark grey but this was changed to maroon after around a thousand cars had been built. In 1950 the hub caps gained MG medallions with the parts list giving the change point as chassis number Y5420. These medallions were the same as those fitted to TDs.

By the late 1940s and early 1950s motor sport was starting to become a major pastime and the crowds seen at those early events were large, even in modern terms. This renewal of enthusiasm for motoring and motor sport led the manufacturers to consider racing their products to gain publicity and the MG factory supported a few of the private owners, competing in their TCs and Y-types, by giving them some help and advice. Y-types were entered in rallies and races with the encouragement of the factory and Betty Haig and Barbara Marshall drove one in the 1950 Monte Carlo Rally. That appears to have been entered by the factory as the car was later sold by them to another competitor, J.L. Shaw, who was later to buy another ex-factory car, this time a YB. Dick Jacobs was a very successful competitor in the Y-type and in the B.R.D.C. Silverstone Production Car Race he had class wins in three consecutive years driving YB, UHK 111. He also raced a YB based special constructed around the last YB chassis. This car was first registered XNO 1, later changed to 982 VWL and was fitted with a glass-fibre coupe

body.

Anyone looking to buy a Y-type to use today will probably be lucky if they found exactly the right car easily. That is not to say that there aren't good cars around, and these do come on the market from time to time, but they are not as plentiful as are most of the open two seaters. This shortage of Y-types to choose from should not tempt any potential buyer into snapping up the first car viewed as it is even more important with these saloons, than the other models, to buy a good one. The very scarcity of cars means that there is a much smaller market for replacement parts, especially body parts, and their complexity makes building a new body from scratch a near impossibility. The Y-type owner cannot go for a new, steel-clad ash frame as a TD owner might, and there are no Heritage body shells!

Therefore, it follows that, unless you enjoy restoring steel bodysells with access to only a few replacement panels, it is vital to look for a car that is bodily fairly sound. The chassis is also prone to rot, especially at the rear and round the body mountings, and many a tired Y-type will rattle about a lot over any large bumps in the road as the rear of the body tries to escape from the clutches of the chassis. Some panels, especially sills and door bottom sections are usually available from suppliers like



DIMENSIONS

A (max.)	46½ in.	1.181 m.
B (min.)	40½ in.	1.029 m.
C	10 in.	.254 m.
D	33 in.	.838 m.
E	18 in.	.457 m.
F	37 in.	.940 m.
G	21 in.	.533 m.
H	12 in.	.305 m.
I	18 in.	.457 m.
J	36 in.	.914 m.
K	23 in.	.584 m.
L	26½ in.	.673 m.
M	12½ in.	.324 m.
N	18½ in.	.470 m.
O	58½ in.	1.486 m.
P	164 in.	4.166 m.
Q	19 in.	.483 m.
R	19 in.	.483 m.
S	49 in.	1.245 m.
T	47 in.	1.194 m.
U	41 in.	1.041 m.
V	38 in.	.965 m.
W	28½ in.	.730 m.
X	59 in.	1.499 m.

COLOURS. Exterior in Shires Green, Regency Red, Black, Sequoia Cream or Clipper Blue, with upholstery and interior trimming in Shires Green, Regency Red or Vellum Beige. Hood and side curtains in Fawn. All colours subject to availability.

N.T.G. and they also list boot lid skins and running boards. They are now working on other panels for repairing the boot area but these will probably be made in small batches. Wings can be made to order or secondhand ones supplied along with other body parts.

Mechanically there are fewer problems. The interchangeability of parts with the sports models ensures a good supply of most replacement items needed to rebuild, say, the engine, but this does not preclude taking a good look at any car bought. If you are paying a good price for the car it is very important that it is fitted with genuine Y-type components. There is probably nothing wrong with a car fitted with replacement parts from other similar models, but this should be taken into account when negotiating a purchase. The Wolseley 4/44, for example, as they have a similar parentage often supplies replacement cylinder blocks, and even complete engines, but the 4/44 engine does not have the MG logo cast into the block and there are differences in the internal oil pick up and in the position of the dip stick. Rebuilds of the XPAG engine are rather more expensive than for later models and a new crankshaft and bearings could cost over £1,200 should the old one be

cracked, as many are. That said it is a good engine and well able to stand tuning for increased performance. Popular now is the modification of the cylinder head to TD MkII/TF specification with 'unleaded' larger valves and hardened valve seats. Aluminium cylinder heads are also available at a price. To take advantage of the larger valves the car really needs the twin carburettor setup used on TCs and TDs, but there isn't any need to fit carburettors larger than 1 1/4 in. with a 1,250 cc engine.

The interior of the car is one of its most attractive features but it is also a very expensive part to restore. Kits to recover the front seats cost nearly £600 plus tax with the rear bench seat and arm rest about as much again. The interior trim panels are fairly complicated and if buying a kit of replacements this could also cost over £500 plus tax. The good thing is that, being a saloon, more cars have retained their original interiors than have the open MGs of the period and often these need only cleaning, leather treatment and light repairs to make them once again attractive.

Although prices of good Y-types have risen in recent years, there are still some nice cars on the market from time to time at reasonable prices. As I have said, restoration can be difficult so it is well worth looking for the best you can afford as this will prove cheaper in the long run. Whatever the cost, it is unlikely that it will be as high as an equivalent open car and the purchase of a good Y-type will give you a car that is both attractive to look at and practical for use in all weathers.

Malcolm Green

